



Fundación Solidaridad in the Dominican Republic

No. 9

Fundación Solidaridad, known locally as *Ayudémonos* (let us help one another), encouraged greater contact between elected local authorities and the citizens of the municipality of Villa González, in the state of Santiago de Los Caballeros.

Ayudémonos is governed by a five-member board. Young professionals founded the organization in 1986 to increase both education and income levels of low-income people and to promote participatory democracy. The 30,000 residents of Villa González are largely low-income farmers (75%) who rely principally on tobacco sales for income.

***Ayudémonos* partners with the town council and the citizens of Villa González to achieve results**

Prior to the partnership, the municipality of Villa González had received requests from citizens for community projects and, due to financial limitations and a lack of means to determine priority needs, could meet almost none of the requests. At the commencement of a project funded by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF), community organizations and municipal authorities were trained to conduct a "needs assessment." Working with *Ayudémonos*, the town council invited citizens to Villa González's first assembly. Within the first two years of the project, *Ayudémonos*'s assistance enabled community members to build a working partnership. Not only have the municipal authorities and citizens learned to work together to accomplish goals, they have gained a new understanding of their strengths.

Specific achievements

- 200 community leaders acquired and applied skills in municipal management, event planning, proposal writing, and evaluation techniques.
- A municipal council was established and created a local development agenda.
- 3 communities with a total of 3,200 inhabitants have improved their roads, one community improved their school, and two communities gained access to electrical power. These projects were funded from various sources: the municipality contributed \$7,500, the communities provided \$20,500, the government electrical agency donated \$5,000, and the private sector contributed \$4,500 (collected by the communities).

- *Ayudémonos* established working ties with 93 community groups and their municipal authorities in the province of Santiago. *Ayudémonos* participates with four local and national networks. Two hundred and fifty public sector organizations and two local private organizations have adopted and applied the *Ayudémonos* methodology in their work.
- *Ayudémonos* mobilized \$31,600 for project activities from various sources (\$3,100 from the central government, \$1,500 from private businesses in Santiago's Duty Free Zone, and \$27,000 from the British International Cooperation and Development Agency).
- *Ayudémonos* brokered \$5,000 from a university for an organization to work towards its municipality's improvement.
- A monthly bulletin as well as a brochure promoting the project was prepared and distributed locally and nationally.
- *Ayudémonos* strengthened its capacity to undertake projects with a community, beginning with needs identification to community members and authorities meeting those needs by working together. *Ayudémonos* subsequently has executed an agreement with the city of Santiago and with the local district of Canela to replicate the project on a larger scale. Finally, *Ayudémonos* has been selected by UNICEF and the Dominican Municipal League to organize training for municipalities in the Cibao region of the country.

An unexpected result was the decision by the municipality of Villa González to create a Community Affairs Department, and print a newsletter to keep residents informed of municipal activities.

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